

from "Studies in a Dying Culture", first published 1938.

Republished 1977 in "The Concept of Freedom", Lawrence & Wishart, London.

LIBERTY

A study in bourgeois illusion

by Christopher Caudwell

Many will have heard a broadcast by H. G. Wells in which (commenting on the Soviet Union) he described it as a "great experiment which has but half fulfilled its promise", it is still a "land without mental freedom". There are also many essays of Bertrand Russell in which this philosopher explains the importance of liberty, how the enjoyment of liberty is the highest and most important goal of man. Fisher claims that the history of Europe during the last two or three centuries is simply the struggle for liberty. Continually and variously by artists, scientists, and philosophers alike, liberty is thus praised and man's right to enjoy it imperiously asserted.

I agree with this. Liberty does seem to me the most important of all generalised goods - such as justice, beauty, truth - that come so easily to our lips. And yet when freedom is discussed a strange thing is to be noticed. These men - artists, careful of words, scientists, investigators of the entities denoted by words, philosophers scrupulous about the relations between words and entities - never define precisely what they mean by freedom. They seem to assume that it is quite a clear concept, whose definition every one would agree about.

Yet who does not know that liberty is a concept about whose nature men have quarrelled perhaps more than any other? The historic disputes concerning predestination, Karma, Free-Will, Moira, salvation by faith or works, determinism, Fate, Kismet, the categorical imperative, sufficient grace, occasionalism, Divine Providence, punishment and responsibility, have all been about the nature of man's freedom of will and action. The Greeks, the Romans, the Buddhists, the Mahomedans, the Catholics, the Jansenists, and the Calvinists, have each had

different ideas of liberty. Why, then, do all these bourgeois intellectuals assume that liberty is a clear concept, understood in the same way by all their hearers, and therefore needing no definition? Russell, for example, has spent his life finding a really satisfactory definition of number and even now it is disputed whether he has been successful. I can find in his writings no clear definition of what he means by liberty. Yet most people would have supposed that men are far more in agreement as to what is meant by a number, than what is meant by liberty.

The indefinite use of the word can only mean either that they believe the meaning of the word invariant in history or that they use it in the contemporary bourgeois sense. If they believe the meaning invariant, it is strange that men have disputed so often about freedom. These intellectuals must surely be incapable of such a blunder. They must mean liberty as men in their situation experience it. That is, they must mean by liberty to have no more restrictions imposed upon them than they endure at that time. They do not - these Oxford dons or successful writers - want, for example, the restrictions of Fascism, that is quite clear. That would not be liberty. But at present, thank God, they are reasonably free.

Now this conception of liberty is superficial, for not all their countrymen are in the same situation. A, an intellectual, with a good education, in possession of a modest income, with not too uncongenial friends, unable to afford a yacht, which he would like, but at least able to go to the winter sports, considers this (more or less) freedom. He would like that yacht, but still - he can write against Communism or Fascism or the existing system. Let us for the moment grant that A is free. I propose to analyse this statement more deeply in a moment, and show that it is partial. But let us for the moment grant that A enjoys liberty.

Is B free? B is a sweated non-union shop-assistant of Houndsditch, working seven days of the week. He knows nothing of art, science, or philosophy. He has no culture except a few absurd prejudices, his elementary school education saw to that. He believes in the superiority of the English race, the King's wisdom and loving-kindness to his subjects, the real existence of God, the Devil, Hell, and Sin, and the wickedness of sexual intercourse unless palliated by marriage. His knowledge of world events is derived from the *News of the World*, on other days he has no time to read the papers. He believes that when he dies he will (with luck) enter into eternal bliss. At present, however, his greatest dread is that by displeasing his employer in some trifle, he may become unemployed.

B's trouble is plainly lack of leisure in which to cultivate freedom. C does not suffer from this. He is an unemployed middle-aged man. He is free for 24 hours a day. He is free to go anywhere - in the streets and parks, and in the museums. He is allowed to think of anything - the Einstein theory, the Frege definition of classes, or the

doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Regrettably enough he does none of these things. He quarrels with his wife, who calls him a good-for-nothing waster, and with his children, who because of the means test have to pay his rent, and with his former friends, because they can enjoy pleasures he cannot afford. Fortunately he is free to remove himself from existence, and this one afternoon, when his wife is out and there is plenty of money in the gas-meter, he will do.

A is free. Are B and C? I assume that A will reply that B and C are not free. If A asserts that B and C do enjoy real liberty, most of us, without further definition, will know what to think of A's idea of liberty. But a Wells, a Forster, or a Russell would doubtless agree, as vehemently as us, that this is not liberty, but a degrading slavery to environment. He will say that to free B and C we must raise them to A's level, the level, let us say, of the Oxford don. Like the Oxford don, B and C must have leisure and a modest income with which to enjoy the good things and the good ideas of the world.

But how is this to be brought about? Bourgeois social relations are what we have now. No one denies that the dynamic motive of such relations is private profit. Here bourgeois economists and Marxists are agreed. Moreover, if causality has any meaning, and unless we are to throw all scientific method overboard, current economic relations and the unfreedom of B and C must be causally inter-related.

We have, then, bourgeois social relations on the one hand, and these varying degrees of unfreedom - A, B, and C - on the other hand, interconnected as cause and effect. So far, either might be the cause, for we have not decided whether mental states arise from social relations, or *vice versa*. But as soon as we ask how action is to solve the problem, we see which is primary. It is useless to give B, by means of lectures and picture galleries, opportunity for understanding philosophy or viewing masterpieces of art. He has no time to acquire, before starting work, the taste for them or after starting work the time to gratify it. Nor is C free to enjoy the riches of bourgeois culture as long as his whole existence is clouded by his economic position. It is circumstances that are imprisoning consciousness, not *vice versa*. It is not because B and C are unenlightened that they are members of the working class, but because they are members of the working class, they are unenlightened. And Russell, who writes *In Praise of Idleness*, praises rightly, for he is clever because he is idle and bourgeois, not idle and bourgeois because he is clever.

We now see the cause and effect of the situation. We see that it is not this freedom and unfreedom which produces bourgeois social relations, but that bourgeois social relations alike give rise to these two extremes, the freedom of the idle bourgeois, and the unfreedom of the proletarian worker. It is plain that this effect, if undesirable, can only be changed by changing the cause.

Thus the intellectual is faced with another problem, like that when he had to define more precisely who enjoyed the liberty he regarded as contemporary. Does he wish that there should exist for ever these two states of captivity and freedom, of misery and happiness? Can he enjoy a freedom which is sustained by the same cause as the workers' unfreedom? For if not, he must advance further and say, "bourgeois social relations must be changed". Change they will, precisely because of this unfreedom they increasingly generate; but to-day the intellectual must decide whether his will be part of the social forces making for change, or vainly pitted against them.

But how are bourgeois social relations to be changed? Not by a mere effort of the will, for we saw that the mind was made by social relations, not *vice versa*. It is matter, the quantitative foundation of qualitative ideology, that must be changed. It is not enough to argue and convince. Work must be done. The environment must be altered.

Science shows us how. We achieve our wants always, not by the will alone, not by merely wishing them into being, but with action aided by cognition, by utilising the physical laws of reality. We move mountains, not by the mere movement of desire, but because we understand the rigidly determined laws of kinetics, hydraulics, and electrical engineering and can guide our actions by them. We attain freedom - that is, the fulfilment of our will - by obedience to the laws of reality. Observance of these laws is simple; it is the discovery of them that is the difficulty, and this is the task of science.

Thus, the task of defining liberty becomes still harder. It is not so easy after all to establish even a contemporary definition of liberty. Not only has the intellectual already had to decide to change bourgeois social relations, but he must now find out the laws of motion of society, and fit social relations into a causal scheme. It is not enough to want to be free; it is also necessary to know.

Only one scientific analysis of the law of motion of social relations exists, that of Marxism. For the understanding of how, physically, at the material level of social being, quantitative movements of capital, of matter, of *stuff*, provide the causal predictive basis of society, and pass via social relations into the qualitative changes of mind, will, and ideology, it is necessary to refer the bourgeois intellectual to Marx, Engels, Plekhanov, Lenin and Bukharin. Let us suppose that he has now done this and returns again to the difficult pursuit of liberty.

His causal conception of society will now enable him to realise that the task of making social relations produce liberty is as rigidly conditioned by reality as the task

of making matter fulfil his desire in the form of machines. All matter - machinery, capital, men - and the relations which they exhibit in society - can only move in accordance with causal laws. This involves first that the old relations must be broken down, just as a house must be pulled down if we would entirely rebuild it, and the transition, putting up and pulling down, must follow certain laws. We cannot pull the foundation first, or build the roof before the walls.

This transitional stage involves the alteration of all the adherances between humans and the capital, machinery and materials, which mediate social relations. These must no longer adhere to individual persons - the bourgeois class - but to all members of society. This change is not a mere change of ownership, for it also involves that no individuals can derive profit from ownership without working. The goods are not destined to go the rounds of the market - the profit movement - but directly into use - the use movement. Moreover, this involves that all the visible institutions depending on private profit relations - laws, church, bureaucracy, judiciary, army, police, education - must be pulled down and rebuilt. The *bourgeoisie* cannot do this, for it is by means of these very institutions - private property (the modest income), law, university, civil service, privileged position, etc., - that they attain their freedom. To expect them to destroy these relations on which, as we saw, their freedom and the workers' unfreedom, depend, is to ask them to go in quest of captivity, which, since liberty is what all men seek, they will not do. But the opposite is the case with the unfree, with the proletariat. The day they go in search of liberty, they revolt. The bourgeois, fighting for his liberty, must necessarily find himself in antagonism to the non-bourgeois, also fighting for liberty. The eventual issue of this struggle is due to the fact that capitalist economy, as it develops, makes ever narrower the class which really owns liberty until the day comes when the intellectual, the doctor, the petty bourgeois, the clerk, and the peasant, realise that they too are not after all free. And they see that the fight of the proletariat is their fight.

What, to the proletarian, is liberty - the extermination of those bourgeois institutions and relations which hold them in captivity - is necessarily compulsion and restraint to the bourgeois, just as the old bourgeois liberty generated non-liberty for the worker. The two notions of liberty are irreconcilable. Once the proletariat is in power, all attempts to re-establish bourgeois social relations will be attacks on proletarian liberty, and will therefore be repulsed as fiercely as men repulse all attacks on their liberty. This is the meaning of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and why with it there is censorship, ideological acerbity, and all the other devices developed by the bourgeois in the evolution of the coercive State which secures his freedom.

There is, however, one vital difference. Bourgeois social relations, generating the liberty of the bourgeois and the non-liberty of the proletarian, depend on the existence of both freedom and unfreedom for their continuance. The bourgeois would not enjoy his idleness without the labour of the worker, nor the worker remain in a bourgeois relationship without the coercive guidance and leadership of the bourgeois. Thus the liberty of the few is, in bourgeois social relations, built on the unfreedom of the many. The two notions dwell in perpetual antagonism. But after the dispossession of the bourgeoisie, the antagonism between the expropriated and therefore unfree bourgeois, and the inheriting and therefore free proletariat, is only temporary. For the owners of the means of production, being also the workers of that means, do not need the existence of an expropriated class. When therefore, the transition is complete, and the bourgeois class is either absorbed or has died out, there is no longer an unfree compelled class. That is what is meant by the "withering away" of the State into a classless society, after the transitional period such as is now taking place in Russia.

This, stated in its simplest terms, is the causal process whereby bourgeois social relations can change into new social relations not generating a mass of unfreedom as the opposite pole to a little freedom. We have purposely made it simple. A fuller discussion, such as Marx gives, would make clearer the fluid interpenetrating nature of the process; how it is brought about causally by capitalist economy itself, which cannot stand still, but clumps continually into greater centralisation, giving rise to imperialistic wars, which man will not forever tolerate, and to viler and viler cash relations, filling men with hate, which will one day become hate for the system. And as capitalism perpetrates these enormities, the cause of revolt, it gives the proletariat the means of revolt, by making them unite, become more conscious and organised, so that, when the time of revolt comes, they have both the solidarity and the executive ability needed to take over the administration of the bourgeois property. At the same time bourgeois social relations reveal that even their freedom is not real freedom, that bourgeois freedom is almost as imprisoning to its enjoyers as the worker's unfreedom. And thus the *bourgeoisie* does not find itself as a solid class, arrayed against the proletariat, but there are divisions in its own ranks, a few at first, and then more and more. The revolution takes place as soon as the proletariat are sufficiently organised by their fight against bourgeois social relations to co-operate, sufficiently harried by their growing unfreedom to demand a new world at all costs; and when, on the other side, as a result of the developing contradictions of capitalism, the bourgeois themselves have lost their grip.

Let us, therefore, go deeper, and examine more closely the true nature of bourgeois freedom. Are H. G. Wells, Bertrand Russell, E. M. Forster, you, reader and I, really free? Do we enjoy even mental freedom? For if we do not enjoy that, we certainly do not enjoy physical freedom.

Bertrand Russell is a philosopher and a mathematician. He takes the method of science seriously, and applies it to various fields of thought. He believes that thoughts are simply special arrangements of matter, even though he calls matter mind-stuff. He agrees that to every psychism corresponds a neurism, that life is a special chemical phenomenon, just as thought is a special biological phenomenon. He is not taken in by the nonsense of entelechies and pure memory.

Why then does he refrain from applying these categories used everywhere else, to the concept of liberty? In what sense can he believe man to be ever completely free? What meaning can he attach to the word freedom? He rightly detects the idealistic hocus-pocus of smuggling God into science as the Life-Force, entelechy, or the first cause, for the sleight of hand it is. But his liberty is a kind of God; something which he accepts on faith, somehow intervening in the affairs of the universe, and unconnected with causality, Russell's liberty and his philosophy live in different worlds. He has made theology meet science, and seen that theology is a barbarous relic. But he has not performed the last act of integration; he has not asked science's opinion of this belief that the graduate of one of the better universities, with a moderate income, considerable intelligence, and some leisure, is really free.

It is not a question of whether man has in some mysterious fashion free will. For if that were the problem, all men would either would or would not have liberty. If freedom consists in having free will, and men have free will, we can will as freely under a Fascist, or proletarian, as under a bourgeois government. But everyone admits that there are degrees of liberty. In what therefore does this difference in liberty consist?

Although liberty does not then depend on free will, it will help us to understand liberty if we consider what is the freedom of the will. Free will consists in this, that man is conscious of the motive that dictates his action. Without this consciousness of antecedent motive, there is no free will. I raise my hand to ward off a blow. The blow dictated my action; none the less, I was conscious that I wanted to ward off the blow; I willed to do so. My will was free; it was an act of my will. There was a cause; but I was conscious of a free volition. And I was conscious of the cause, of the blow.

In sleep a tickling of the soles of the feet actuates the plantar reflex. Such an action we call involuntary. Just as the warding movement was elicited by an outside stimulus, so was the bending of the leg. None the less, we regard the second as unfree, *involuntary*. It was not preceded by a conscious motive. Nor were we conscious of the cause of our action. We thus see that free will exists in so far as we

are conscious of the antecedent motive in our mind, regarded as the immediate cause of action. If this motive, or act of will, is itself free, and not forced, we must also be in turn conscious of the antecedent motive that produced it. Free will is not therefore the opposite of causality, it is the *consciousness* of causality. That is why man naturally fits all happenings outside him in a causal frame; because he is conscious of causality in himself. Otherwise it would be a mystery if man, experiencing only uncausality in free will, should assume, as he does, that all other things are linked by causality. If, however, he is only assuming that other objects obey the same laws as he does, both the genesis and success of causality as a cognitive framework for reality are explicable.

Causality and freedom are thus aspects of each other. Freedom is the consciousness of necessity. The universe as a whole is completely free, because that which is not free is determined by something else outside it. But all things are, by definition, contained in the universe, therefore the universe is determined by nothing but itself. But every individual thing in the universe is determined by other things, because the universe is material. This material is not "given" in the definition of the universe, but is exactly what science establishes when it explains the world actively and positively.

Thus the only absolute freedom, like the only absolute truth, is the universe itself. But parts of the universe have varying degrees of freedom, according to their degrees of self-determination. In self-determination, the causes are within the thing itself; thus, in the sensation of free will, the antecedent cause of an action is the conscious thought of an individual, and since the action is also that of the individual, we talk of freedom, because there is self-determination.

The freedom of free will can only be relative. It is characteristic of the more recently evolved categories that they contain more freedom. The matter of which man is composed is in spatio-temporal relation with all other matter in the universe, and its position in space and time is only to a small degree self-determined. Man's perception, however, is to a less degree in relation to the rest of the universe; it is a more exclusive kind of perception that sees little not in the immediate vicinity of man, or in which it is not interested, and it is largely moulded by memory, that is, by internal causes. Hence it is freer, more self-determined, than the spatio-temporal relations of dead matter. Man's consciousness is still more self-determined, particularly in its later developments, such as conscious volition.

Man constantly supposes that he is freer than he is. Freudian research has recently shown that events at the level of being - i.e. unconscious psychological events - may give rise to disturbances which usurp conscious functions. In such circumstances a man may not be conscious of the motives of his actions, although he believes he is.

He is therefore unfree, for his will's determination arise from events outside consciousness. An example is the neurotic. The neurotic is unfree. He attains freedom by attaining self-determination, that is, by making conscious motives which before were unconscious. Thus he becomes captain of his soul. I am not now discussing the validity of the various methods by which this knowledge is obtained, or what neurological meaning we are to give to Freudian symbolism. I agree with this basic assumption of Freudian therapy, that man always obtains more freedom, more self-determination, by a widening of consciousness or, in other words, by an increase of knowledge. In the case of his own mind, man, by obtaining a knowledge of its causality, obtains more freedom. Here too freedom is seen to be a special form of determinism, namely, the consciousness of it.

But man cannot simply sit and contemplate his own mind in order to grasp its causality. His body, and likewise his mind, is in constant metabolic relation with the rest of the universe. As a result, when we want to trace any causal mental sequence, in order to be conscious of it, we find it inextricably commingled with events in the outer world. At an early stage we find we must seek freedom in the outer as well as the inner world. We must be conscious not only of our own laws, but of those of outer reality. Man has always realised that whatever free will may mean, it is not will alone, but action also which is involved in liberty. For example, I am immersed in a plaster cast so that I cannot blink an eyelid. None the less, my will is completely free. Am I therefore completely free? Only extremely idealistic philosophers would suggest that I am. A free will is therefore not enough to secure liberty, but our actions also must be unconstrained. Now everyone realises that the outer environment continually constrains our freedom, and that free will is no freedom unless it can act what it wills. It follows that to be really free we must also be able to do what we freely will to do.

But this freedom, too, leads us back to determinism. For we find, and here no philosopher has ever disputed it, that the environment is completely deterministic. That is to say, whatever motion or phenomenon we see, there is always a cause for it, which is itself caused, and so on. And the same causes, in the same circumstances, always secure the same effects. Now an understanding of this iron determinism brings freedom. For the more we understand the causality of the universe, the more we are able to do what we freely will. Our knowledge of the causality of water enables us to build ships and cross the seas; our knowledge of the laws of air enables us to fly; our knowledge of the necessary movements of the planets enables us to construct calendars so that we sow, embark on voyages, and set out to meet each other at the times most conducive to achieving what we will to do. Thus, in the outer world too, determinism is seen to produce freedom, freedom is understood to be a special form of necessity, the *consciousness* of necessity. We see that we attain freedom by our consciousness of the causality of subjective

mental phenomena together with our consciousness of the causality of external phenomena. And we are not surprised that the characteristic of the behaviour of objects - causality - is also a characteristic of consciousness, for consciousness itself is only an aspect of an object - the body. The more we gain of this double understanding, the more free we become, possessing both free will and free action. These are not two mutually exclusive things, free will versus determinism - but on the contrary they play into each other's hands.

From this it follows that the animals are less free than men. Creatures of impulse, acting they know not why, subject to all the chances of nature, of other animals, of geographical accidents and climatic change, they are at the mercy of necessity, precisely because they are unconscious of it.

That is not to say they have no freedom, for they possess a degree of freedom. They have some knowledge of the causality of their environment, as is shown by their manipulations of time and space and material - the bird's flight, the hare's leap, the ant's nest. They have some inner self-determination, as is shown by their behaviour. But compared to man, they are unfree.

Implicit in the conception of thinkers like Russell and Forster, that all social relations are restraints on spontaneous liberty, is the assumption that the animal is the only completely free creature. No one constrains the solitary carnivore to do anything. This is of course an ancient fallacy. Rousseau is the famous exponent. Man is born free but is everywhere in chains. Always in the bourgeois mind is this legend of the golden age, of a perfectly good man corrupted by institutions. Unfortunately not only is man not good without institutions, he is not evil either. He is no man at all; he is neither good nor evil; he is an unconscious brute.

Russell's idea of liberty is the unphilosophical idea of bestiality. Narkover School is not such a bad illustration of Russell's liberty after all. The man alone, unconstrained, answerable only to his instincts, is Russell's free man. Thus all man's painful progress from the beasts is held to be useless. All men's work and sweat and revolutions have been away from freedom. If this is true, and if a man believes, as most of us do, as Russell does, that freedom is the essential goal of human effort, then civilisation should be abandoned and we should return to the woods. I am a Communist because I believe in freedom. I criticise Russell, and Wells, and Forster, because I believe they are the champions of unfreedom.

But this is going too far, it will be said. How can these men, who have defended freedom of thought, action, and morality, be champions of unfreedom? Let us proceed with our analysis and we shall see why.

Society is a creation by which man attains a fuller measure of freedom than the beasts. It is society and society alone, that differentiates man qualitatively from the beasts. The essential feature of society is economic production. Man, the individual, cannot do what he wants alone. He is unfree alone. Therefore he attains freedom by co-operation with his fellows. Science, by which he becomes conscious of outer reality, is social. Art, by which he becomes conscious of his feelings, is social. Economic production, by which he makes outer reality conform to his feeling, is social, and generates in its interstices science and art. It is economic production then that gives man freedom. It is because of economic production that man is free, and beasts are not. This is clear from the fact that economic production is the manipulation, by means of agriculture, horse-taming, road-building, car-construction, light, heating, and other engineering, of the environment, conformably to man's will. It enables man to do what he wills; and he can only do what he wills with the help of others. Without roads, food supplies, machines, houses, and clothes, he would be like the man in a plaster cast, who can will what he likes, and yet is not a free man but a captive. But even his free will depends on it. For consciousness develops by the evolution of language, science, and art, and these are all born of economic production. Thus the freedom of man's actions depends on his material level, on his economic production. The more advanced the economic production, the freer the civilisation.

But, it will be argued, economic production is just what entails all the 'constraints' of society. Daily work, division of labour under superintendents, all the laws of contract and capital, all the regulations of society, arise out of this work of economic production. Precisely, for, as we saw, freedom is the consciousness of causality. And by economic production, which makes it possible for man to achieve in action his will, man becomes conscious of the means *necessary* to achieve it. That a lever *must* be of a certain length to move the stone man *wills* to move is one consequence; the other is that a certain number of men *must* co-operate in a certain way to wield the lever. From this it is only a matter of development to the complicated machinery of modern life, with all its elaborate social relations.

Thus all the 'constraints', 'obligations', 'inhibitions', and 'duties' of society are the very means by which freedom is obtained by men. Liberty is thus the social consciousness of necessity. Liberty is not just necessity, for all reality is united by necessity. Liberty is the consciousness of necessity - in outer reality, in myself, and in the social relations which mediate between outer reality and human selves. The beast is a victim of mere necessity, man is in society conscious and self-determined. Not of course absolutely so, but more so than the beast.

Thus freedom of action, freedom to do what we will, the vital part of liberty, is seen to be secured by the social consciousness of necessity, and to be generated in the

process of economic production. The price of liberty is not eternal vigilance, but eternal work.

But what is the relation of society to the other part of liberty, freedom to will? Economic production makes man free to do what he wills, but is he free to will what he will?

We saw that he was only free to do what he willed by attaining the consciousness of outer necessity. It is equally true that he is only free to will what he will by attaining the consciousness of inner necessity. Moreover, these two are not antagonistic, but, as we shall now find, they are one. Consciousness is the result of a specific and highly important form of economic production.

Suppose someone had performed the regrettable experiment of turning Bertrand Russell, at the age of nine months, over to a goat foster-mother, and leaving him to her care, in some remote spot, unvisited by human beings, to grow to manhood. When, say forty years later, men first visited Bertrand Russell, would they find him with the manuscripts of the *Analysis of Mind* and the *Analysis of Matter* in his hands? Would they even find him in possession of his definition of number, as the class of all classes? No. In contradiction to his present state, his behaviour would be both illogical and impolite.

It looks, therefore, as if Russell, as we know and value him, is primarily a social product. Russell is a philosopher and not an animal because he was taught not only manners, but language, and so given access to the social wisdom of ages of effort. Language filled his head with ideas, showed him what to observe, taught him logic, put all other men's wisdom at his disposal, and awoke in him affectively the elementary decencies of society-morality, justice, and liberty. Russell's consciousness, like that of all useful social objects, was a creation. It is Russell's consciousness that is distinctively him, that is what we value in him, as compared to an anthropoid ape. Society made him, just as it makes a hat.

It goes without saying that Russell's 'natural gifts' (or, as we say more strictly, his genotype) were of importance to the outcome. But that is only to say that the material conditions the finished product. Society is well aware that it cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear or, except in special circumstances, a don out of a cretin. But it is also aware that out of iron ore you can make rocks, bridges, ships, or micrometers, and out of that plastic material, man's genotype, you can make Aztecs, ancient Egyptians, Athenians, Prussians, proletarians, parsons, or public schoolboys.

It also goes almost without saying that a man is not a hat. He is a unique social product, the original of Butler's fantasy of machines that gave birth to machines. He himself is one of those machines. The essential truth about man, as compared with hats, is that he is not a hat, but the man who wears it. And the essential truth about this fashioning process of man by society, is that the fashioning is primarily of his consciousness, a process that does not take place with anything else. Now it is precisely because society elaborates his consciousness, that man, although a social product like a hat, is capable of free will, whereas a hat, being unconscious, is not capable of free will. The coming-to-be of a man, his 'growing up', is society fashioning *itself*, a group of consciousnesses, themselves made by previous consciousnesses, making another. So the torch of liberty is handed on, and burns still brighter. But it is in living that man's consciousness takes its distinctive stamp, and living is simply entering into social relations.

But, it will be urged, man - the individual - sees the world for himself alone - mountains, sky, and sea. Alone in his study he reflects on fate and death. True. But mountains and sea have a meaning to him, precisely because he is articulate-speaking because he has a socially-moulded consciousness. Death, fate, and sea are highly-evolved social concepts. Each individual contributes a little to altering and elaborating them, but how small a contribution compared to the immense pressure of the past! Language, science, and art are all simply the results of man's uniting with his fellows socially to learn about himself and outer reality, in order to impose his desires upon it. Both knowledge and effort are only possible in co-operation, and both are made necessary by man's struggles to be freer.

Thus man's inner freedom, the conscious will, acting towards conscious ends, is a product of society; it is an economic product. It is the most refined of the products society achieves in its search for freedom. Social consciousness flowers out of social effort. We give vent in effort to our instinctive desires. Learning how to accomplish them we learn something about the nature of reality and how to master it. This wisdom modifies the nature of our desires, which become more conscious, more full of accurate images of reality. So enriched, the desires become subtler, and, in working to achieve profounder goals, in more elaborate economic production, gain still deeper insight into reality, and, as consequence, themselves become yet more enriched. Thus, in dialectic process, social being generates social mind, and this interplay between deepening inner and outer reality is conserved and passed on by culture. Man, as society advances, has a consciousness composed less and less of unmodified instinct, more and more of socially-fashioned knowledge and emotion. Man understands more and more clearly the necessities of his own being and of outer reality. He becomes increasingly more free.

The illusion that our minds are free to the extent that, like the beasts, we are unconscious of the causality of our mental states, is just what secures our unfreedom. Bourgeois society to-day clearly exhibits in practice this truth, which we have established by analysis in theory. The bourgeois believes that liberty consists in absence of social organisation; that liberty is a negative quality, a deprivation of existing obstacles to it; and not a positive quality, the reward of endeavour and wisdom. This belief is itself the outcome of bourgeois social relations. As a result of it, the bourgeois intellectual is unconscious of the causality that makes his consciousness what it is. Like the neurotic who refuses to believe that his compulsion is the result of a certain unconscious complex, the bourgeois refuses to believe that his conception of liberty as a mere deprivation of social restraints arises from bourgeois social relations themselves, and that it is just this illusion which is constraining him on every side. He refuses to see that his own limited liberty, the captivity of the worker, and all the contradictions of developing bourgeois relations - pacifism, Fascism, war, hate, cruelty, disease - are bound in one net of causality, that each is influenced by each, and that therefore it is fallacious to suppose a simple effort of the will of the free man, without knowledge of the causes will banish Fascism, war, and slumps. Because of his basic fallacy, this type of intellectual always tries to cure positive social evils, such as wars, by negative individual actions, such as non-co-operation, passive resistance or conscientious objection. This is because he cannot rid himself of the assumption that the individual is free. But we have shown that the individual is never free. He can only attain freedom by social co-operation. He can only do what he wants by using social forces. If, therefore, he wishes to stop poverty, war, and misery, he must do it, not by passive resistance, but by using social relations. But in order to use social relations he must understand them. He must become conscious of the laws of society, just as, if he wants to lever up a stone, he must know the laws of levers.

Once the bourgeois intellectual can see that society is the only instrument of freedom, he has advanced a step farther along the road to freedom. But until then he is unfree. True he is a logician, he understands the causality of nature, Einstein's theories, all the splendid apparatus of social discovery, but he still believes in a magic world of social relations divorced from these theories, in which only the god of bourgeois liberty rules. This is proved, not only in his theory, in the way his doctrine of liberty is accepted like a theological dogma, and never made to square with all his philosophic and scientific knowledge; but it is also proved in action, when the bourgeois intellectual is powerless to stop the development of increasing unfreedom in bourgeois society. All the compulsions of militancy, Fascism, and economic distress harry contemporary society, and all he can oppose to them is individualistic action, conscientious objection and passive resistance. This is bound to be the case if he is unfree. Like a man who believes he can walk upon the water and drowns in it, the bourgeois intellectual asserts a measure of freedom that does

not in fact exist, and is therefore unfree mentally and physically. Who cannot see iron compulsion stalking through the bourgeois world today? We are free when we can do what we will. Society is an instrument of freedom in so far as it secures what men want. The members of bourgeois society, all of them, worker, capitalist, and capitalist-intellectual, want an increase in material wealth, happiness, freedom from strife, from danger of death, security. But bourgeois society to-day produces a decrease in material wealth and also creates unemployment, unhappiness, strife, insecurity, constant war. Therefore all who live in bourgeois society - democratic, Fascist or Rooseveltian - are unfree, for bourgeois society is not giving them what they desire. The fact that they have, or have not, votes or 'freedom of speech' does not alter, in any way, their unfreedom.

Why does not bourgeois society fulfil the wants of its members? Because it does not understand the laws of economic production-it is unorganised and unplanned. It is unconscious of the necessities of economic production, and, because of that, cannot make economic production fulfil its desires. Why is it unconscious of the necessities of economic production? Because, for historical reasons, it believes that economic production is best when each man is left free to produce for himself what seems to him most profitable to produce. In other words, it believes that freedom is secured by the lack of social organisation of the individual in the function of society, economic production. As we saw, this individual freedom through unconsciousness is a delusion. Unconscious, deluded bourgeois society is therefore unfree. Even Russell is unfree; and in the next war, as in the last, will be put in gaol.

This very unfreedom - expressed as individualism - in the basic function of society, ultimately generates every form of external constraint. The bourgeois revolutionary asserted a fallacious liberty - that man was born good and was everywhere in chains, that institutions made him bad. It turned out that this liberty he claimed was individualism in private production. This revealed its fallacious nature as a freedom by appearing at once as a restraint. For it could only be secured, it was only a name, for unrestricted right to own the means of production, which is in itself a restriction on those who are thus alienated from their livelihood. Obviously, what I own absolutely my neighbour is restricted from touching.

All social relations based on duty and privilege were changed by the bourgeois revolution into exclusive and forcible rights to ownership of cash. I produce for my individual self, for profit. Necessarily, therefore, I produce for the market, not for use. I work for cash, not from duty to my lord or retainer. My duties to the State could all now be compounded for cash. All my obligations of contract, whether of marriage or social organisation, could be compounded for cash. Cash appeared as the only obligation between men and men, who were otherwise apparently completely free-free master, free labourer, free producer, free consumer, free

markets, free trade, free entrepreneur, the free flow of capital from hand to hand and land to land. And even man's obligations to cash appeared an obligation of cash to him, to be absolutely owned by him.

This dissolution of social obligations could be justified if man was free in himself, and if, doing what seemed best for him, for his own good and profit, he would in fact get what he desired, and so secure freedom. It was a return to the apparent liberty of the jungle, where each beast struggles only for himself, and owes no obligations to anyone. But this liberty, as we saw, is an illusion. The beast is less free than man. The desires of the jungle cancel each other, and no one gets exactly what he wants. No beast is free.

This fallacy at once revealed itself a fallacy in the following way. Complete freedom to own property meant that society found itself divided into haves and have-nots, like the beasts in the jungle. The have-nots, each trying to do what was best for him in the given circumstances, according to the bourgeois doctrine of liberty, would have forcibly seized the property from the haves. But this would have been complete anarchy, and though anarchy, according to bourgeois theory, is complete liberty, in practice the bourgeois speedily sees that to live in the jungle is not to be free. Property is the basis of his mode of living. In such circumstances social production could not be carried on, and society would dissolve, man return to savagery, and freedom altogether perish. Thus the bourgeois contradicted his theory in practice from the start. The State took its distinctive modern form as the enforcement of bourgeois rights by coercion. Police, standing army and laws were all brought into being to protect the haves from the 'free' desires of the havenots. Bourgeois liberty at once gives rise to bourgeois coercion, to prisons, armies, contracts, to all the sticky and restraining apparatus of the law, to all the ideology and education centred round the sanctity of private property, to all the bourgeois commandments. Thus bourgeois liberty was built on a lie, hound to reveal in time its contradictions.

Among the have-nots, bourgeois freedom gave rise to fresh coercions. The free labourer, owning nothing, was free to sell his labour in any market. But this became a form of slavery worse, in its unrestricted form, than chattel slavery, a horror that Government Blue Books describing pre-Factory Act conditions make vivid for all their arid phraseology. They show how unrestricted factory industrialisation made beasts of men, women, and children, how they died of old age in their thirties, how they rose early in the morning exhausted to work and knocked 'off late at night only to sink exhausted to sleep, how the children were aged by work before they had ceased to be infants. Made worse than a slave-for he was still free to be unemployed-the labourer fought for freedom by enforcing social restraints on his employers. Banding with others in trade unions, he began the long fight that gave

rise to the various Factory Acts, wage agreements, and all the elaborate social legislation which to-day coerces the bourgeois employer.

And, after all this, even the bourgeois himself is not free. The unrestricted following of his illusion of liberty enslaves him. His creed demands unrestricted competition, and this, because it is unrestricted, works as wildly and blindly as the weather. It makes him as unfree, as much at the mercy of a not understood chance, as a cork bobbing on the waves. So he too seeks freedom in restraint - industry is increasingly sheltered by amalgamations, rings, tariffs, price agreements, 'unfair competition' clauses, subsidies, and Government protection for the exploitation of colonial areas. Bourgeois liberty makes overt its self-contradictions by becoming monopoly.

Here is the secret paradox of bourgeois development and decline. The bourgeois abandoned feudal relations in the name of a liberty which he visualised as freedom from social restraints. Such a liberty would have led to savagery. But in fact the liberty he claimed - 'unrestricted' private property - really involved restraint, that is, it gave rise to complex forms of social organisation, which were more manysided, more incessant, and more all-pervading, than feudal restraints. Thus the cash relation, which he conceived as putting an end to all social restraints, and thus giving him liberty, did give him a larger measure of liberty than in feudalism, but in the opposite way to his expectations, by imposing far more complex organisations than those of feudal civilisation. All the elaborate forms of bourgeois contracts, market organisation, industrial structure, national States, trade unions, tariffs, imperialism and bureaucratic democratic government, the iron pressure of the consumer and the labour market, the dole, subsidy, bounties-all these multifarious forms of social organisation - were brought into being by a class that demanded the dissolution of social organisation. And the fact that bourgeois civilisation obtained a greater measure of control over its environment than feudal - and was that much freer - is precisely because all these complex social organisations were brought into being - but brought blindly.

Blindly brought into being; that is the source of the ultimate unfreedom of bourgeois civilisation. Because it is not conscious of the fact that private ownership of the means of production, unrestricted competition, and the cash nexus, of their natures involve various forms of restraint-alienation from property, captivity to slump and war, unemployment and misery-bourgeois society is unable to control itself. The various forms of social organisation it has blindly erected, as an animal tunneling for gold might throw up great mounds of earth, are all haphazard and not understood. It believes that to become conscious of them fully, to manipulate them consciously for the ends of the will; is to be an advocate of determinism, to kill liberty, to bring into birth the bee-hive state. For still, in spite of all the havoc the bourgeois sees around him, he believes that only the beast is free, and that to be

subject to all the winds of chance, at the mercy of wars and slumps and social strife, is to be free.

Any definition of liberty is humbug that does not mean this: liberty to do what one wants. A people is free whose members have liberty to do what they want - to get the goods they desire and avoid the ills they hate. What do men want? They want to be happy, and not to be starved or despised or deprived of the decencies of life. They want to be secure, and friendly with their fellows, and not conscripted to slaughter and be slaughtered. They want to marry, and beget children, and help, not oppress each other. Who is free who cannot do these things, even if he has a vote, and free speech? Who then is free in bourgeois society, for not a few men but millions are forced by circumstances to be unemployed, and miserable, and despised, and unable to enjoy the decencies of life? Millions are forced to go out and be slaughtered, or to kill, and to oppress each other. Millions are forced to strive with their fellows for a few glittering prizes, and to be deprived of marriage, and a home, and children, because society cannot afford them these things. Millions and millions of men are not free. These are the elements of liberty, and it is insane-until these are achieved-for a limited class to believe it can secure the subtleties of liberty. Only when these necessities are achieved, can man rise higher and, by the practice of art and science, learn more clearly what he wants, and what he can get; having only then passed from the sphere of necessity to that of freedom.

Each step to higher consciousness is made actively with struggle and difficulty. It is man's natural but fatal error to suppose that the path of liberty is easy, that liberty is a mere negative, a relaxation, the elimination of an obstacle in his path. But it is more than that. True freedom must be created as strenuously as we make the instruments of freedom, tools and machines. It must be wrested out of the heart of reality, including the inner reality of man's minds.

That is why all lovers of liberty, who have understood the nature of freedom, and escaped from the ignorant categories of bourgeois thought, turn to Communism. For that is simply what Communism is, the attainment of more liberty than bourgeois society can reach. Communism has as its basis the understanding of the causality of society, so that all the unfreedom involved in bourgeois society, the enslavement of the have-nots by the haves, and the slavery of both haves and have-nots to wars, slumps, depression and superstition, may be ended. To be conscious of the laws of dead matter: that is something; but it is not enough. Communism seizes hold of a higher degree of self-determination, to rescue man from war, starvation, hate, and coercion, by becoming conscious of the causality of society. It is Communism that makes free will real to man, by making society conscious of itself. To change reality we must understand its laws. If we *wish* to move a stone,

we *must* apply the leverage in the proper place. If we *wish* to change bourgeois social relations into communist, we *must* follow a certain path. The have-nots, the proletariat, must take over the means of production from the haves, the bourgeoisie, and since, as we saw, these two freedoms are incompatible, restraint, in the form of the coercive State, must remain in being as long as the bourgeoisie try to get back their former property. But unlike the former situation, this stage is only temporary. This stage is what is known as the dictatorship of the proletariat, the necessary step from the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie - which is what the bourgeois State is - to the classless State, which is what Communism is. And as Russia shows, even in the dictatorship of the proletariat, before the classless State has come into being, man is already freer. He can avoid unemployment, and competition with his fellows, and poverty. He can marry and beget children, and achieve the decencies of life. He is not asked to oppress his fellows.

To the worker, subject to unemployment, starved in the midst of plenty, this path eventually becomes plain. Despite the assurances of the bourgeoisie that in a democratic or national State he is completely free, he revolts. And who, in those days, will stand by his side? Will the bourgeoisie, themselves pinched and disfranchised by the growing concentration of capital, discouraged, pessimistic, harried, into war and oppression by 'forces beyond control', and yet still demanding liberty? On the answer to that question, which each individual bourgeois must make, sooner or later, will depend whether he strives in those days to make men free or to keep them in chains. And this too depends on whether he has understood the nature of liberty. The class to whom capitalism means liberty steadily contracts, but those once of that class who are now enslaved to war, and imperialism and poverty, still cling to that bourgeois interpretation of liberty that has abundantly proved its falsehood. They can only escape and become free by understanding the active nature of liberty, and by becoming conscious of the path they must follow to attain it. Their will is not free as long as they will liberty but produce unfreedom. It is only free when they will Communism and produce liberty.

This good, liberty, contains all good. Not only at the simple level of current material wants, but where all men's aspirations bud, freedom is the same goal, pursued in the same way. Science is the means by which man learns what he can do, and therefore it explores the necessity of outer reality. Art is the means by which man learns what he wants to do, and therefore it explores the essence of the human heart. And bourgeoisdom, shutting its eyes to beauty, turning its back on science, only follows its stupidity to the end. It crucifies liberty upon a cross of gold, and if you ask in whose name it does this, it replies, 'In the name of personal freedom'.

From: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/caudwell/1938/liberty.htm>

Course: Philosophy and Religion

18051, Caudwell, Liberty, A study in bourgeois illusion, 1938

9578 words